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DRUID SONNETS

By MILDRED FOWLER FIELD

I

TEMPERATE

There is a green that wells within a bough
Faint as the thought of leaves that are to lift
From pointed buds; along a hillock's brow
Pale trees are chimes far-off. There is a gift
Of deeper green the older woodlands hold
On long, blue days: low hazes that appear
Only when trees have other-selves of gold
Made mellow by the music of the year.

There is a green that blues to violet
In pine and spruce; a willow-green turned gray
From drinking of the stream it bends beside —
Hill-greens where maple trees like galleons ride
The billowed grass — and often on a day
Of wind and rain their sails are silver-wet.

II

SUBTROPICAL

Something there is that sounds along the land
In subtle dissonance of palm and fern :
Mounting arpeggios of green that yearn
Up to the blurred release of westering sand.
Music — with arabesque of moss and vine
Lulls all to somnolence; no windy urge
Shatters the theme of leaf-designs that merge
The song of lotos to the song of pine.

Day goes. Oh, Luminous, it were enough
These muted chords of rose and faded jade;
Mauve mist along the marsh; and shadowed spears
Of trees in dim lagoons. A gray gull veers
Down the long melody the dusk has played,
One lone harmonic trailing toward the Gulf.

III

PRONE ON THE GRASS

Prone on the grass I lay and presently
I heard the brown roots breathing through the ground,
Felt the cool shoots press upward silverly
And open with a little singing sound
Under the sun . . . but it beat me body and brain
To trampled gold across a long low hill —
The winds high over wove a blue refrain
That left me merged and infinite and still.

All things were known upthrobbing through the dust —
Chimed in the swayed gray body under mine:
I was no more than seedling stalk upthrust
And every finger a small pointed pine. . . .
Prone on the grass I lay and was aware
Of three white windflowers growing in my hair.

FOOLSFACES

By WALTER L. MYERS

In the October sunshine, pumpkins gleamed suddenly through the dry corn like lamps of gold. The radiance halted Burton Newell and drew his eyes from dull distressed intentness upon the cow path under his feet. He stared at those vivid globes as if he had never before seen their like. They were beautiful. They were hateful. He could endure far and wide about him opulence of russet oaks, quiet gray of laden corn, dreamful haze of a resting earth, all the contentment of autumn mellow upon wooded hills and ample fields; but those pumpkins glowing, bursting with the soil's richness — The sight of them sharpened misery into torment.

Cold sweat chilled Burton's temples as he gazed at the great golden, useless things. Throughout his body, lean from months of toil and anxiety, the nerves strained taut; his mind, which he had that afternoon stilled somewhat by hard striding, whirled again in the circle of his helplessness. He set off abruptly toward the scattered oaks in the river valley below the cornfields.

These were his fields and timbered slopes; yet Burton, farmer-clad though he was, did not seem at home there. In every movement he unconsciously declared himself alien to his world, alien too in the sensitivity of his face, a boyishness persistent but withered and marred as by a long-held look of bitter incredulity.

Astounding had been the season's yield. The corn had grown with the warm damp of the summer as in a gardener's forcing bed, and cribs were packed now with solid masses of crude gold. They were the product of high-priced land and costly labor, — and they were almost worthless. The whole harvest would scarcely pay for itself.

If Burton could buy cattle, if he could hold the corn until spring, if — For weeks he had gone rushing from

if to if with the fantastic inventiveness of the born money-loser, silent, desperately silent always, hiding even from Frances, his wife, the coming-on of poverty, ruin, and worse.

It had been easy enough to deceive Fran. She had been enchanted by the blue-green up-rushing of the stalks whenever she had noticed them; and she asked no questions. Her patrimony, to be sure, every cent of it, had gone into the farm; but from any real concern as to why and how money should be spent if only it were spent, from all things in life ever so faintly worrisome, no words could express Fran's remoteness. Once or twice early in the winter, when Burton had just bought the land and was all a-thrill, he had tried to make Fran see that they had acquired not a country estate, a mere week-end resort, but an Enterprise with Overhead and Depreciation and Net Returns, a splendid future for energies that he had all his thirty-odd years wasted in such futilities as teaching, poetizing, editing, and the like, a fulfilment of his destiny, country-born that he was though town-reared. Neither he nor Fran had thought of making a home on the farm. As well reside in one's factory; not done by the truly competent.

Toward the end of spring, the farm ceased to be a fine adventure. Life became one unmitigated necessity, corn plowing. Burton had no energy for ten-mile journeys to town. In consequence, he and Fran had never before been so continuously separated as during this spring and summer. And it had seemed that his life paused, while hers went on with a gladness and an independence that soon became sinister. At first Burton told himself that he was growing morbid because corn prices were falling; but there had been a day when he overheard talk about Fran between two old friends of his, — and what fluttering week-end party of hers was complete without young Borne and his red and ochre car?

Unacknowledged jealousy companioned itself with his

financial worry; the two throve as rankly as the corn on hot nights when he lay sleepless, or in the vacant-mindedness of hard labor during the day. Now the harvest time had come.

Ardent to fulfil that destiny of his, Burton had gone far with mortgages, notes, obligations of many sorts, staking all on the harvest; and promptly with the decline in corn there had come dire tightness of money, great niggardliness of all who make loans. Bankruptcy and ruin must follow within the month. But these were not the worst in prospect. Fran's inheritance had included a sum held by her father in trust; as administrator, Burton must deliver it within the quarter. The penalty for not doing so — He could not bring himself to phrase it even in thought. Degradation and torture.

More and more frequently as the summer passed, there had come to Burton moments such as those the pumpkins had given him. The only refuge was physical weariness. Torpid now after much rapid walking, he came slowly from the timbered pastures along the river up steep slopes to the corn lands.

A neighbor was husking in a field close at hand. The tossed ears beat with regularity against the side-board of the wagon. The husker was "Old Jasp." He was owner of a tiny estate of woodsy slopes and cleared summits, a mystery and an anomaly strayed in years since from nowhere, "crazy as a loon," his eccentricities half accounted for by years of prospecting in the West. Burton, drawn in part by an instinct for literary copy, in part by a sense of humorous kinship, and at times by something vague yet compulsive and quite distinct from friendship, had talked often with the old man. Just now Burton wanted a companion, an uncritical, irrational fellow being. He climbed the line fence separating his farm from Jasp's.

Automatically after the word of greeting, Burton began to strip the heavy, pendulous ears and toss them into

the wagon. When he spoke again, he was fingering a bar of the rounded grain-gold; he voiced a bitter parody of his own futile financiering. "Jasp, I just came up to ask for a map to that lost mine of yours in the Mojave Desert."

"Fool's gold for fools. Leave it be. Don't you compete, Newell. There's likely a fool headed for it this minute. He'll camp on it and go on and never know what a lucky fool he was when he didn't dig under his campfire."

In the whimsical sparkle of Old Jasp's eyes and in the wrinkled Puckishness of his visage, was the comradeship that Burton sought. Yet stronger than ever before was Burton's sense of contact with something aloof, something that no jumbling of fate could ensphere with mortgages and market reports. The old man's general picturesqueness of life, the whole shambling, stumpy-bodied drollery of him would not sort with the eternal commonplaceness of the cornfields. Farmer folk had long ago given up all attempt to understand Old Jasp; they had a way of falling abashed and almost surly before his impish quiddity.

"By the way, what do you call a man who finds a fortune and then deliberately ambles away from it?" Burton kept his eyes and brows grave but let his lip-corners twitch.

"Say it, boy, say it." Old Jasp's eyes narrowed in self-mockery. "A plumb fool; that's me, — bigger'n him that's campin' over it now. But I thought I was comin' back ever year. Somethin' always tolled me off farther and farther. Got to thinkin' about it like it was something I heard tell of when I was a kid. By hooks, maybe I did! Wouldn't it beat hell if that's what I did after all? Holy mackerel, that's a new idee! Whoop!"

Burton let himself go, perhaps just a bit hysterically. Brothers in ageless whimsy, the two rocked together, as pliant to mirth as saplings to a breeze.

"Gad," chuckled Burton, slowing his laughter, "wish I could laugh at myself that way."

"You was then. You was laughin' at yourself for bein' fool enough to laugh at me for bein' a fool I never maybe was. Hey, that's a good one! Might of come out of a book. I ain't never said that before!"

For a space, then, Burton silently tossed the ears into the wagon, trying to give himself wholly to the rhythm, trying to stop thought except such of it as had to do with the enigma working at his side.

"Trouble with you, Newell, is you won't go and be as damn foolish as this here world is you're livin' in. You do well for a *muchacho*, but you don't get the real kick out of it. Why, there's times when I could bust to think of things! Look at this corn. Grown like it never did before, millions of bushels of it. And this year it ain't worth huskin'. Next year it may be scarce as hair on a snake and so high-price you couldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Either way there's thousands of fellers sweat-in' and cussin' and runnin' theirselves ragged. I tell you, Newell, there's got to be fellers that lays back and hollers theirselves *loco*, laughin' at this world. Sometimes I go out in the timber and whoop like hell myself just at things."

Could Burton do anything but chuckle? Yet there stood in his mind images not wholly mirthful: high cloistral tree-spaces echoing to peals from a rocking figure, full-bodied, hands on sides, wide-mouthed in the shadows. Puck? No, Pan perhaps, something faun-like at least. The laughter of the high gods at things created.

"Hey, *campadre*, I'll show you the comicallest damn thing on earth next to a rooster or a half-grown boy or two women visitin' over a telephone. Ain't nobody ever seen it but my woman, and I can't make her laugh at it like a man does at a joke. I've tried for forty years to make her laugh like that. Come on along."

The strange comradeship in Old Jasp's slanted glance

gave Burton a slight pride and with it the dim foreboding of one who awaits initiation into mysteries half sneered at, half believed in.

The brink of the steeps leading down to the river was clearly enough Old Jasp's destination, and in that place were — pumpkins. This last became evident at some distance. Among the corn stalks on the verge of a long grassy pitch to the water, were such pumpkins as Burton had never seen unless depicted incredibly by seed catalogues. They were great vegetable boulders swollen with all the virtues of earth to such size that Burton walked thigh-deep among them.

Old Jasp perched crosslegged upon one of the monsters like a mahout on the head of his elephant. "Look at 'em, boy. Ain't one of 'em under three hundred pounds, and that fellow there'll go five hundred or I'm a liar. There's sixty or more of 'em all along this field here close to the edge. Figure it up. They weigh damn near as much as my corn crop, and never worth a cent year after year. And the joke of it is they look as rich as so much free gold. Ever' time I see 'em I feel like I'd made a strike; can't help it."

Burton's whimsy caught step boyishly, throwing off habitual care and an odd momentary chill quiescence. "Great stuff, Jasp! That one there now, that's a limousine for Cinderella! And Jack-o'-lanterns! Jack-o'-lanterns like lighthouses, like moons!"

"You've said it, boy! You've said it! That's just what I do with 'em!"

"What, jack-o'-lanterns?"

"Sure as hell jack-o'-lanterns. Foolsfaces, boy, foolsfaces on Hallowe'en, forty or fifty of 'em grinnin' all along this ridge. Ever' year I seed down from the biggest of 'em just for that. Comicallest damn thing! Foolsfaces, laughin' Chineese idols on Hallowe'en!"

Burton was beyond laughter, beyond speech.

"Reckon I hadn't ought' to tell you this. The old

woman is the only person that knows it, or there'd sure be a lunacy commission after me; but you'll savey, and it's almost Hallowe'en, only one more day now — tomorrow night! You want to know?" A canny, elfin sureness came suddenly into Old Jasp's face. "I'll go the whole hog. Do you know what I do with 'em finally? Sure you do. I roll 'em down hill to the river, by crinus! They go down like bats out of hell! See that little narrow level strip with the cow trail? You know it's a forty-foot drop on the other side straight down to the water. Lord, how they jump when they hit that level strip! Some of 'em bust like fire crackers. First I edges 'em over and props 'em up with boards — and the boards all tied to a rope so's I can send down half a dozen big fellows at a time if I want to. Fill 'em with kerosene rags and brace 'em inside with sticks; and down they goes, me whoopin' up here on the ridge! Ain't that crazy as hell? Come on and help, if you're crazy enough!"

"I'll be with you!" cried Burton valiantly. "We'll be crazy as they make 'em!" But under this somewhat noisy hilarity there was rising the knowledge that what Jasp would enact upon Hallowe'en was not lunacy. It was paganism. It was both a rite and a defiance, a gesture before the presence of whatever powers were responsible for life's incongruities. Understanding surged upon Burton, — keen awareness of his own distresses; of Old Jasp's mockery of life; and at the same moment an awareness of serene beauty out there across the river, beauty of cloudless sky, smoothly rounded slopes, and russet-brown woodlands toned now with eastward-stretching shadows and sweeping gravely down to the tranquil stream. As for Old Jasp, he had somehow divested himself of mere engaging whimsicality and comradeship; he had become remote, almost idolesque, the symbol of a universe too strange for thought.

Yet no word of this did Burton try to voice in all the

talking and laughing and chuckling by which he outwardly justified the old man's confidences. At length, holding silently his new vision of earth and life, lifted for a time above self-concern, Burton went home through the autumnal twilight.

His evening meal was served by the wife of his farm helper. It was a simple repast enough and automatically eaten; nevertheless the act of taking food pulled Burton down from the height where Old Jasp had placed him. He could not remain indoors, and on the veranda took the nightfall with its cool silence. He could sit motionless; but his brain drove hard, searching, rending memories, reshaping them laboriously to a strange pattern of which he had small mastery. Chimerical his entire life seemed now; not one of his most cherished recollections but it became a thing fantastic, ironic, monstrous. There took form in him sardonic defiance of all the powers that make destiny. With the deepening twilight, there defined itself the thought that at his own will he could cease, upon this earth at least, to make hilarity for the high gods. The unhallowed sense of finality in this thought sent him to bed, calmed and awed.

Through the routine of the next morning, he retained a feeling of mastery with which he crowded out recurrences of despair; yet he kept the idea of actual self-destruction always far away.

Toward noon Fran telephoned that she was coming to the farm soon, next day perhaps. Young Borne would bring her. She was too hurried for talk.

Long after the goodbye Burton stood with the receiver in his hand, staring at the mute instrument. Those moments of talk had been desperately hard. Fran's sweet, light voice and the sound of her hurried breathing had brought her before him as clearly as if she had been within arm's reach. He had seen words taking mobile life upon her lips, those lips he always watched whenever Fran spoke. He had seen the flutter of her disengaged

hand, the quick grace in the ceaseless turning and tilting of her head with its modeling of bright hair.

And with this sense of Fran's presence had come to Burton the stark consciousness that, whether he willed it or not, she must soon know of what he was guilty, what feebleness, what undaring, what easily concealed dishonesty. When she knew, then her life would be cut clean away from his; this he could not doubt. It would be better to tell her, of course; and the sooner — He had a vision of himself confessing, heard his own words. His hand trembled so that he could scarcely put up the receiver. So unescapable, so much a part of that very room was the prospect of torture that Burton fled the place, seeking again the comfort of rapid motion.

It was denied him. Stride fiercely as he might, he found no peace in all the Indian summer distances or in the vast, drowsy silence broken only by the crows, whose bursts of cawing echoed under the sky like voices in an empty hall.

Something in their clamor, perhaps, at last brought dimly to Burton memory of the strange, bitter exultation that had been his yesterday. Blindly yet eagerly, he sought for it; and thus, scarcely aware of direction or place, drew toward the hillcrest of the giant pumpkins.

In the margin of his timber, Burton paused with a sharp sense of arrival. The height and Old Jasp's cornland were in full view. Then Burton remembered fully. That night would be Hallowe'en. On the very brink of the descent, Old Jasp had built a close line of huge yellow globes masked somewhat by cornstalks. Details of the old man's preparations crowded into Burton's mind, anticipation of gargantuan doings when darkness came to this prosaic hillside. Thus circling, Burton's mind found the region it sought.

He was taken by a sort of mirthless hilarity, a gigantic pagan abandon; he could have staggered the earth with Thor's hammer, have toppled mountains down the deeps

of the sky, roaring with cyclopean derision at the chaos that called itself a created world. He strode away through the woodland.

Now motion gave him ease again, and in it he abode. Grass and cornland, stubble and furrow swept beneath his feet. Only at dusk did the loom of his own farm buildings stop him.

Stock still, then, in the highway, he gazed at those familiar shapes, the ugly rectangular dwelling, the barn with the sweeping beauty of its wide roof, the pointed tower of the silo, which made Fran call the farm their château. Here was day-by-day reality itself, incredible, malignant. Burton felt suddenly as if he stood at the brink of a grave in which he was to be buried alive. Slowly, with averted eyes, he moved up the lane, opened his door, entered, and stood in close darkness. Then he struggled. Blind and rigid, he fought his way through a pall of terror. By imaginings multitudinous, fiery, grotesque, pitiable, hysteric, splendid, he built up for himself a great and consuming radiance.

Ten minutes later, there lay upon the table of the living room a note for Fran, a scrawled bit of melodrama quite unworthy of Burton Newell's skill of phrase:

"In the river below Old Jasp's place. Leave me there and be happy with Borne. Burton."

As clearly as is possible for one whose mind labors and leaps and races as do the engines of a storm-tossed ship, Burton held a resolve. He would daunt the gods in their mirth; he would venture his mortality into their most wild carnival. If he won, he had somehow shamed all powers to respect and silence. If he lost, he had launched his soul either into a fitting comradeship or into nothingness. Just at the moment when Old Jasp's jack-o'-lanterns came flaming down to the river, Burton would stand on the path skirting the slope. From above, the possible impact of the monstrous vegetables; below, the water. Let the Foolsfaces decide.

He was fumbling at the door, when the sound of a hard-driven motor stopped him like a shout of command. Only young Borne would roar that way around the corner and up the lane. Here came an end to things deadly and splendid. Here would be sordidness, defilement, and futile agony. The moment Borne had gone, Fran must be told everything.

Silently he held the door while they entered. Silent and but half comprehending, he listened to Fran's chatter and watched the lamp light ruddy young Borne's over-handsome face. Then the boy was gone and Fran turned to Burton with a perplexed frown.

"What is the matter, Burton? Why can't you talk?"

He shook his head, opened his mouth, and made no sound.

"Burton, what is it?" There was distress now, surely distress, in the wide space between her brows. Distress too upon her lips.

It was intolerable, Burton's need to have faith in her. How could he, in the clear-shining presence of her, go on believing what he had accepted and held for so long as the truth? What *was* the truth? He had no power to sift it out. He managed a few gruff words.

"Nothing. I'm dog-tired. Going to go to bed as soon as I take a look at the stock. I can't talk when — I'm this way." And he found himself standing beyond the closed door, facing the night, drawn out toward the certainty of that darkness.

Stars shone and a hoarfrost was making in the stillness. There was sense of waiting. Shaken by the effort, Burton forced himself to turn and extend a hand toward the doorknob. He could get no farther. It was not for this beyond the door that the night waited. Let that come later in the light of day — if need be. With a gladness contained and consuming, he turned once again and set out. This night was his in which to escape, if so the gods willed, from love and pain and fear.

The air had a chill density like that of deep waters; and Burton could move only with slow, trance-like progress, a mingling of ease and difficulty such as one feels who walks immersed. So he came to the edge of his woodlands. The heights were dark against the sky.

Unhesitating, he walked along the hillside path until he could stand exactly midway. Here was the place destined; here the waiting.

He stood with eyes uplifted. Time passed. He lived as never before, highly, strangely.

Then a noise, very light, shattered the silence, — the sound of flying feet. That forgotten note of his! Fran! Fran, of course, speeding along the path, Fran come to take him back, down —

She was upon him, dragging at his shoulders with all the slight strength of her hands as if to draw forth truth itself. "Burton," she panted, "what is it? What does it mean, that note?"

The answer was a blaze running along the hillcrest, flash after flash of great fiery faces in the night.

"The Foolsfaces," whispered Burton. "Let them look! Be still!"

Eyes round, lidded, slit-like, slanted; mouths shaping all mirth from deep-lunged shout to sly lip-quirk. Grotesque animations as the fires smoked and flared. Almost it seemed that tongues moved, lips were retracted, and heads wagged along that line, as though conclave of huge figures, dark-bulked, inward-flaming, crowded the whole hilltop and thronged the sky.

Again Burton was caught up into the high pagan abandon by which he was master over all things whatsoever in life. He turned upon Fran.

"Get away from here! You don't belong in this! You don't belong with me! Go away with — him. Let me out of it."

"Burton! Burton, it's not true. I knew there was talk, old cats' talk. I laughed at it. Oh, Burton, I

thought I'd tell you someday. I didn't know — I didn't think you'd not tell me if — ”

In the line of flaming faces, one bowed slowly, went dark, flashed then in a rumbling whirl of fire straight toward them, swerved, leaped out at the river. Shrill halloos pealed from the hilltop. There came another rush of fire; another and another — Foolsfaces searching thunderously the whole hillside.

If he had been alone, Burton would have lifted his voice to the wild shouting on the hillcrest; his throat strained to declare his presence and participation.

But he could not participate while Fran's arms were round him. He wrenched at them; they clung with a strength equal to his own. They were the life he had denied; they were pain and fear and love.

“I won't! I won't! Burton, I won't leave you! Oh, the horrible — Oh, see it!”

At their very feet the blazing thing smote the earth and hurtled outward. The great voice above them swelled to louder, more cadenced shouting.

“Run, Fran, run! Let me alone! Damn you, you hate me! Run!”

If she did not go, if she did not —

“I won't! Burton! I'll stay with you always! I hate him! You, Burton!”

“You can't! I've stolen money. I've lost all yours. They'll make a jailbird of me! I'm a thief! I've made us poor. I've failed! I'm — Fran, oh, Fran!”

Words had ceased, almost breath. There passed a second with all time in it. Then Burton knew that something deadly and monstrous had gone out of him forever.

“Burton! Burton! You! I want you! I don't care! I can't go! Oh, it'll kill — ” Though she thrust her face against Burton, she twisted her shuddering body to shield him. That Foolsface did not touch them.

“Fran!” His arms tightened. “I know! If only sooner! Fran!” A towering sense of supremacy. From

the remaining Foolsfaces flamed forth beauty. Beyond were stars and night and a peace whose all-encompassing finality made silence of the maudlin bawling on the hill-crest. For Fran and for him, pain and fear, and love, and life — surely life. He kissed her and turned to lead her along the path.

Yet at the moment of turning, Burton saw the whole line of Foolsfaces slowly bowing, slowly in unison. Useless to run now. Only death and the meeting of it. He held Fran from the great blow. Just before it came, he laughed.

AUTUMN WALK

By RUTH LECHLITNER

There should be some better way
Than this, I know,
To tell you why I went today
Where red leaves blow;

Where scarlet branches darkly bleed
Across the hill, —
And flame and amber colored reed
The marshes fill.

Reasons have been far lovelier told,
But none more true
Than mine: I followed this white road
Because — I happened to!

A THORN

By FLORENCE S. PAGE

He rushed up the steps two at a time, whistling loudly in spite of himself, and slid the key deftly into the lock. The small bright-new apartment was of course empty; Phil and Jim never appeared in the daytime. He threw open the long window above the street, and took a deep, delighted breath.

By George, he'd sold that roof to the McAllisters! Gosh, that would make a commission! Maybe he'd have a car himself before long. He grinned and caught a glimpse of the grin in the mirror. "Hi, old Gold-fish!" But say, wasn't it luck!

He tore into his room and ripped the paper loudly off his laundry. Just time to get out for nine holes before dark. Not a chance for eighteen. It was getting dark earlier now. Bill waiting downstairs, and where the devil was his tie? His crisp yellow hair stood up straight in his frenzy.

And there was the telephone.

"H'lo."

"What tonight? This tonight? What show? . . . Sure."

"Sure, I will. . . . Better dancing at Knight's though."

"All right."

Theatre and girls and dancing. New girls, but there needn't be much time for bothering to talk. Good old theatre; good old dance.

"Aye, Bill!" he yelled out the window. "In a sec."

That fool telephone again!

"H'lo."

"Oh! — Yes, Miss Reynolds, — " It was the office. What the —

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Say, Miss Reynolds, that's mighty kind of you. You bet; I'll go over and land it first thing in the morning."

"You bet. It's migh —"

"It's mighty kind of you, Miss Reynolds." He tried to knot his tie while he listened.

"Well, thanks."

"Well, thanks. It's sure kind of you."

"Goodbye."

Funny old duck, Miss Reynolds, bothering to tell him about that chance. Funny old duck, but she was sure nice to him. Probably she didn't have anything else to think about but the office; she looked pretty old, over thirty. Thin as an ant, and scurrying like one going up a tree, and a kind of wistful black stare that got on your nerves unless you kidded her a lot. She always wanted to stand and talk, too, when you were in a hurry. Funny! The other day she'd said with a sort of scared gasp, "Don't get mixed up with that elevator girl, Mr. Forster. She's — she's not a nice girl." He hadn't ever *thought* about the elevator girl, but since then Miss Reynolds acted as if she'd saved him! Well, she felt kind of motherly, he guessed.

Dashing through the living room to find some money, — he'd stuck a bill somewhere, he remembered, — there was the mail on the floor by the door. Two notices, a postcard with a red brick building on it from his brother, — a letter. Mollie's writing! His heart gave a queer flop. Why was *Molly* writing? He stuffed the letter in his pocket, and hurled downstairs.

"Go long, Bill." They were whizzing through the crowded afternoon, along the shining new apartment walls all lighted with the sun, across the tracks by huddling, dowdy store windows, out to the boulevards, green and flecked with people, — the air was sharper, how it made your blood race! The wind laid his hair back

roughly. The McAllister roof, sold and sealed, made a comfortable warm feeling in his breast.

Poplars flashed by like tall green flames. They circled in at the country club, and plunged into their game of golf. Never had he had such luck with approach shots, never such straight enormous drives. They sped from his whirling club bullet-fashion. He wanted to dance around like a boy at a bonfire, whooping with pride at himself. Gee, he hoped he wasn't acting like a kid. But, being alive today —

Only on the porch, when he was waiting for Bill, he remembered Molly's letter. Funny for her to write, after all this time. Why, it had been two years, almost three. And surely, it had ended certainly enough. Why did she need to appear again?

He pulled the letter impatiently from his pocket, and looked at it. His eyes were ice-blue, and his eyebrows straight, instead of quirking at the corners. It wasn't a remarkably fat one; her letters used to look like fat little robins. He tore it open and read it through. Finished it just as Bill came round the corner.

"All right, son. Let's go."

They were hurtling down the drive again. Molly was vivid against him. Her deep, enchanting little laugh. Her tilted eyelashes. How wild he had been about her! He hadn't been able to stay away from her house. Even when he couldn't see her, he'd walked round and round the block like a mechanical sentry.

"Look at that fool skid."

"Damned idiot."

Her funny, pointed handwriting. "You won't understand, I know." That was how she began. How could anyone understand her? He'd never understood when they had split up. Only it had been something sweet and wild and strange (strange as those adjectives in his mind) and then had vanished. She had said it wasn't

there any longer, for either of them. Wasn't it? He didn't know.

But now, this queer whim of writing to him, out of nothing. And explaining carefully that it wasn't because she wanted them to know each other again. How simply mad girls were. Why write to him, if she wasn't wanting, somehow, to begin again? Yet somehow she made him think that she didn't. "Only, only, I want, I *have* to know how you feel about me now. *I have to*, Blims. Tell me." He didn't want to write to her. He was afraid he would.

They were back at the apartment. Phil and Jim were hanging from the window. Bang. Clatter and smoke and noise. Hustle. Food. Phil vanishing silently. Simply not there. Jim stretched out in his long chair by the blue window, with his pipe and one of his inexhaustible pile of books. Drawling,

"Go it, young Harlequin."

What'd he mean? Sometimes you got tired of never understanding what he said, and seeing his lazy, half-sarcastic smile over his everlasting book. He was a good old scout, though. Damned clever, too, more brains than Phil and himself twice over.

He slammed the door with recovered good humor. Another dash, through dark and gleams of yellow, this time. The wide gold-splashed theatre, and laughter, and white arms, and gay quick music.

Gay, quick, and wistful music, through snatches of talk.

She wasn't there. Molly wasn't there. He would never know her again. — Well, he didn't want to. Why had she written? He felt anger pushing dully. Darn her, why couldn't she leave him alone? He felt the old forgotten restlessness rise in him. He did not want to feel it again.

The curtain rose. There were waves of orange dancers. Black comedians made him laugh. Applause

broke suddenly. Color and light and movement swept on and on.

There was a girl who sang in the branches of a wobbly tree. Molly had sat like that in an apple tree once, and answered his stern questions docilely. The darling! How hard she had tried to tell the truth to him! His heart ached suddenly at the memory. There was never anybody like Molly, so capricious, so sweet, so hateful, so disarming.

“Your mem’ - ry pier - ces,
Like — a — sharp thorn — ”

the girl on the stage sang, smiling gayly. That was it. It hurt. Did Molly know that sometimes, — why the sound of leaves in the wind at night would do it, or a florist’s window, massed with roses, in the rain, — they had stopped once to look at roses, — Molly’s face under her umbrella —

“Oh, Mr. Forster, don’t you like that song?”

“What song?” Oh, of course; that girl on the stage was still singing.

“Oh, Mr. Forster, aren’t you *funny*!”

“Sure I like that song.”

“Don’t you like music, Mr. Forster? Don’t you like to dance?”

“I’ll show you how I like it when this is over.”

It was a marvellous night to dance. They went somewhere, up to a place that was half outdoors. A wind swept across the polished floor sometimes; there was a funny old-gold tarnished autumn moon above the roofs. He danced on tirelessly. The air wasn’t too hot, as it sometimes was; the music was exciting. Wonderful stuff to drink, wonderful food. *Wonderful* stuff to drink. Won —. He felt as though they all liked him. Everybody liked him. He felt as though they all knew he’d sold McAllisters a roof. He’d sold McAllisters a roof when no one else could, and he was going on, selling miles and miles of expensive roofs to millions and mil-

lions of expensive people. And they were all proud of him.

And then the girl fell down with him. With *him*, who prided himself on his dancing. She was the fattest girl in the party, not really fat, but blonde and fattish, and very solid, like Swiss cheese. He'd kept away from her because she bumped, he could see. Bumped in a June bug way around the room, and giggled. But then he began to feel so cheerful he asked her before he knew he was going to do it.

The very first thing she did was to fall down flat on her back and pull him down on top of her. If he hadn't fallen *on* her, he wouldn't have minded so much. Not that he hurt her. She had giggled more than ever.

"*Did* you see us fall down?" she asked everyone. "*Did* you see us?" Us! Once when he was a kid he had hit a girl on the head with a croquet mallet for cheating. He wished he had a croquet mallet now. He could feel the mallet coming down square on her flat head, and a comforting "Plunk!" like a gourd.

He didn't begin to get over the humiliation till he was going home again, in the chilly late-night air, alone. Then he half laughed, lighting his last cigarette, and striding along the deserted street. Oh, well!

Tomorrow night he'd be in Phil's speed-boat on the river. Good old boat. Tearing along down the black water with white wings of foam folding back on each side. — If he had luck with the Davenport roof tomorrow — Miss Reynolds had been a peach to tell him. — What was the way to approach the old man? Not economy, not lasting qualities. Showiness, really. Only disguised. He could do it, he felt confidence strongly through him. If he sold that tomorrow, after today's job, he'd be solid! He walked faster, breathing deeply. He liked the wind against his face. He was sorry when he found himself at the apartment.

He went into the dark rooms. Phil and Jim were in,

and already asleep. You could tell that. He chuckled, throwing off his coat and hat. An envelope lay on the floor. Molly's writing. Gosh, Molly's letter! He felt for it hastily. It was there.

He sat down at the desk and turned on the light, looking at the crumpled letter. Might as well answer it now. He might forget if he didn't do it right away. He pulled out sheets of paper, and unscrewed his new fountain pen, looking at it curiously. What was he going to say? There was Molly, waiting to know what he thought of her. What did he?

He sat, scriggling marks on an envelope, looking more and more like a little boy kept in after school. A conscientious little boy, trying hard to get through his lesson.

He didn't want to hurt Molly. . . . He didn't want to make her think he was still longing for her, if she — . . . Could she be just laughing at him? He remembered his feeling of anger at her, in the theatre. But then he felt tenderness once, there, too. His pen zig-zagged on and on, up and down the envelope.

At last he sat up straight, and took a sheet of paper. Decision had come to him. He would tell the simple truth and stop. Then, however she felt about it — How could he know he was writing it forever? He wrote slowly and carefully:

"I don't think about you at all. Only once in a while a memory pierces me, like a sharp thorn."

BRIEF REVIEWS

The Dreadful Decade. By DON C. SEITZ. (Bobbs Merrill, \$3.50.) Reading Mr. Seitz's new book is like reading the scandal page of your favorite newspaper. I should say that the four leading phenomena of the 'seventies were "reconstruction" and rehabilitation in the South, the great western movement, the progress in invention coupled with an industrial revolution, and the governmental scandals of the time. The constructive elements in these movements Mr. Seitz neglects: he treats the government's disgrace in full, but his interest in the South's great post-war struggle is limited chiefly to the Louisiana war and the Ku Klux Klan, and the other two phenomena mentioned he barely touches upon. He refers to the western movement only to declare that it was unnecessary and unwise. But these strictures are not really criticisms of the thing Mr. Seitz is doing in his book. His study should have been called "The Scandals of the 'Seventies," and the scandals here discussed are important enough to have their place in history. Jim Fisk and Jay Gould and Oakes Ames and William M. Tweed and Victoria Claffin Woodhull are, moreover, interesting rogues. One feels that our historian is ever inclined to give the disadvantage of the doubt to his characters, perhaps because the more shameful a rogue the more interesting he is.

F. L. M.

Caravan, by JOHN GALSWORTHY. (Scribner, \$2.50). This is probably the most important book of short stories issued last year. It contains the fifty-six shorter tales written by Mr. Galsworthy between 1900 and 1923. Few if any writers of this literary form excel him in the patterning of a story or in that gift so necessary to the short story writer of brief characterization. This volume of 760 pages contains a deal of excellent writing, and some of the outstanding short story successes of the last quarter century.

F. L. M.

BIOGRAPHICAL

MILDRED FOWLER FIELD, whose work has appeared in earlier numbers of *THE MIDLAND*, as well as in *Poetry* and other periodicals, is a resident of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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